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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000801

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2010

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SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER ON BILATERAL RELATIONS, MEDIA POLICY, CRACKDOWN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz under Section 1 .5 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a courtesy call by the Ambassador at the Ministry on June 2, new Minister of Information Tichaona Jokonya defended the GOZ's media policy and its Operation "Restore Order". He said he wanted better relations with the independent media and with the USG. The Ambassador condemned the GOZ's crackdown in urban areas and stressed that concrete measures by the GOZ to improve governance would have to precede any improvement in bilateral relations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Jokonya opened the meeting by telling the Ambassador that, after a long career with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was a diplomat, not a politician. However, the ruling party was pushing him as a recently elected MP to spend considerable time in his district (Chikomba in Masvingo Province) cultivating relations with his constituents. He spoke fondly of his four years in the United States as PermRep and said that he was proud to be a "free citizen" of Louisiana. He half-jokingly asked if this citizenship would spare him inclusion on our sanctions list.

Minister Defends GOZ Media Policy, Seeks Rapprochement With Independent Media

¶3. (C) Conceding that he was still learning the ropes at the Ministry, the Minister launched into a familiar rehearsal of historical sketches on land reform and Tony Blair's purported personal vendetta against the GOZ. Jokonya then moved to defenses of various aspect of the GOZ's media policy. He asserted that the much-criticized Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) was not as draconian as portrayed by the western media. The GOZ had not arbitrarily banned The Daily News (TDN, an independent newspaper closed in 2003), which he maintained was closed after it refused to obey the law by registering. He noted that TDN's new application remained before the Media and Information Commission, and he urged that we reserve further judgment on the GOZ's media policy pending the adjudication of the TDN application.

¶4. (C) Jokonya emphasized his interest in repairing the Ministry's relationship with the independent media. He had initiated a dialogue with its representatives and was trying to address their complaints and suggestions. For example, he was examining the composition of the Media and Information Commission, which journalists complained inadequately represented the perspective of journalists. He asserted that when pinned down about AIPPA, media representatives' complaints boiled down to certain aspects of registration requirements and purported selective application of its provisions. He was sure something could be worked out on both issues.

Seeks Better Relationship With USG

¶5. (C) The Minister encouraged the USG to work more closely with his ministry. He noted that we worked well with other GOZ ministries, such as the Ministry of Public Health, and emphasized that he was open to American suggestions on how to improve operations at his Ministry. He said he had been enormously impressed with the current and preceding Secretaries of State, and complimented the First Lady on

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comments she made in Egypt regarding U.S. tolerance for different paths to democracy. If the USG could talk to North Korea, he concluded, it should be able to collaborate more closely with Zimbabwe, a country with which it had much more in common. He said that he wanted his Ministry to be where diplomats came when they wanted something done; he emphasized that he would relay our views to "the highest level" when we came to him.

Ambassador Condemns "Restore Order", Urges Concrete GOZ

Measures to Enhance Relations

16. (C) The Ambassador said that the USG would welcome different approaches and an improvement in bilateral relations. He reiterated his message to President Mugabe that shrill public rhetoric did nothing to advance either country's interest and that the governments should engage more meaningfully with each other face to face. However, dialogue would only go so far as long as we were divided by fundamental principles that could not be papered over or finessed through image management.

17. (C) The Ambassador told the Minister that the Embassy watched closely for signals that would justify a return to our formerly constructive relations but discerned few. In particular, the USG was appalled at the unconscionable abuses associated with the GOZ's Operation "Restore Order", which had deprived tens of thousands of their homes and livelihoods. Limitations on freedom of expression and continued gross economic mismanagement represented additional constraints. We welcomed indications of positive shifts in GOZ media policy and hoped to see them bear fruit. The key to prospects for improved bilateral relations would continue to be concrete measures for improved governance on the GOZ's part.

18. (C) Jonkoya briefly defended "Restore Order", casting it as a legitimate exercise to stem "criminal elements", but noted its "inconsistency" with other national objectives and expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's comments.

VOA; Public Diplomacy

19. (C) The Ambassador welcomed the Minister's offer to work more closely together and encouraged more contact between the official media and the Embassy's Public Affairs Section. He noted that he had offered to do his first in-country interview with the state-controlled Herald, which had not taken him up. Jonkoya responded that he would work to facilitate the Ambassador's access to Zimbabwe's official media.

10. (C) The Ambassador added that the Voice of America was charged with projecting balanced views on the Zimbabwean situation and welcomed engagement with GOZ ministers and representatives; few had exploited the opportunity. Jokonya criticized VOA for broadcasting sensationalist, often misleading or untrue stories about Zimbabwe, and asserted that it maintained an anachronistic "Cold War" view of Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, he undertook to listen to it more often and said he would look into the possibility of greater GOZ engagement with VOA.

Comment

11. (C) Jokonya is a relative breath of fresh air in comparison to his clever but shrill and vitriolic predecessor Jonathan Moyo. We have already seen modestly positive shifts in GOZ media policy. Opposition MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai's castigation of "Restore Order", for example, was

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given airtime by the national broadcaster this past week, and an extended critique of GOZ economic policies by the private sector, including commercial farmers, was aired June 8. Jokonya is unlikely to stand up to Mugabe or the party hierarchy on critical issues but, as a diplomat and elder statesman, he may be an effective conduit of information and we intend to take him up on his offer to engage more closely with his ministry and through it the country's official media.
SCHULTZ